NEW YORK TIMES

FEB 1 1 1962 [redacted]

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Soviet Gesture

In Freeing Powers

On May 7, 1960, Premier Khrushchev told a cheering Supreme Soviet:

> [The U-2] was shot down more than 2,000 kilometers [1,300 miles] inside the Soviet Union * * * We have parts of the plane and we also have the pilot, who is quite alive and kicking.

Mr. Khrushchev's statement was the diplomatic bombshell of 1960. Before its reverberations died away the secrecy had been stripped from an extraordinary enterprise in aerial reconnaissance over Russia, a Big Four summit conference lay in ruins, and East-West relations had entered a period of acute tension.

Last week the Russians released the U-2 pilot, Francis Gary Powers, in exchange for Col. Rudolf Abel, a Soviet spy imprisoned in the U. S. since 1957. The Russians said they were making a gesture to improve relations with the United States. The reaction in the U. S. emphasized that it was only a gesture, and that the important issues [illegible] two countries remained to be resolved.

Moscow has made political use of the Powers case from the outset.

Mr. Powers was brought down May 1, 1960, while flying his U-2 plane over the heart of Russia. The U-2, a high-altitude craft carrying elaborate reconnaissance equipment, had been in super-secrecy used for several years for such flights by the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency.

'Cover Story'

The first U. S. reaction to the news that the plane was down in Russia was to put out a false "cover" story—that the plane was a weather research craft that might have strayed inadvertently over the Russian border. The story had to be dropped when Mr. Khrushchev, in his May 7 appearance before the Supreme Soviet, revealed that the pilot had been captured and had confessed to spying. Mr. Eisenhower assumed full responsibility for the flight, saying espionage was "a distasteful but vital necessity"; subsequently he said the U-2 flights were discontinued.

At the time of Mr. Powers' capture, the Soviet leader was in a difficult position. He had invested much of his prestige—possibly against Stalinist opposition at home and in Peiping—in wooing President Eisenhower, and yet clearly was not going to get the political concessions on Berlin and related cold war issues he sought. He now faced the prospect of being left empty-handed after a Big Four summit meeting.

In this situation Mr. Khrushchev apparently decided to exploit the Powers incident to the full, blaming the U. S. for bad faith and for "criminal" aggressive designs—although U. S. experts were certain that Soviet radar had apprised him of previous reconnaissance flights over Russia by U-2 planes during the preceding four years. In fact, Mr. Khrushchev's extreme reaction in the Powers incident may have been a cover for embarrassment over Russia's inability up to then to do anything about the U-2 flights.

Demands Apology

Another view of Mr. Khrushchev's reaction was that the Powers incident provided him with a pretext for wrecking the summit conference. This he proceeded to do as soon as he arrived in Paris for the summit conference. He demanded a personal apology from President Eisenhower, and [illegible] humiliat[illegible] [illegible] were [illegible] shambles [illegible] outrage of [illegible]

After the [illegible] fiasco, East-West relations [illegible] a new low. As for Mr. Powers, [illegible] was tried in Moscow [illegible] guilty to espionage [illegible] began in Peshawar, Pakistan, and was to end in Norway, but that he was shot down by a ground-to-air rocket south of Sverlovsk and parachuted to safety. He was sentenced to ten years—three in jail and seven in a prison colony.

Not until President Kennedy took office did there appear to be any attempt by Moscow to re-establish serious diplomatic discourse with the United States. Almost immediately after the President's inauguration, Moscow announced that it was releasing the two surviving crew members of an RB-47 plane that had been shot down near Russia's Arctic coast shortly after the Powers flight. President Kennedy spoke of the release as a good augury and there was talk—and some minor evidence—of easing of East-West tensions.

The cold war climate fluctuated ambiguously all during the spring of 1961 until the Vienna meeting in June between President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev. There a new freeze set in. In sessions President Kennedy later described as "somber," Premier Khrushchev laid down new ultimatums for a Berlin settlement.

Soviet Resumes Tests

The atmosphere of crisis over Berlin continued all through the summer and was heightened last fall when Moscow embarked on its new series of nuclear tests. But beginning more or less with the Twenty-second Congress of the Communist Party in Moscow last October, with its evidence of a deep ideological conflict within the Soviet bloc, there has been a marked easing of Soviet pressure. In recent weeks Western diplomats, struck by the lack of any clear Soviet policy or new initiatives, have been using the word "lull" to describe the international atmosphere.

One of the activities that went on behind the scenes during the lull was an effort to arrange an exchange of Colonel Abel for Mr. Powers. The initiative came in part from Mr. Powers' father, acting through James B. Donovan, the court-appointed attorney who defended Colonel Abel in his 1957 espionage trial, and who in turn was in close touch with the C.I.A. But the efforts clearly would have got nowhere if Moscow had not become receptive to the idea of an exchange.

The exchange took place shortly before 8 A. M. yesterday on the Glienicker Bridge between Wannsee and Potsdam at the border of East Germany and West Berlin. Ten men in civilian clothes, escorting Colonel Abel, drove up from the Western side and walked to the white line at the center of the bridge. They were met there by ten men in civilian clothes who had come from the Communist side with Mr. Powers. The exchange was delayed